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ABSTRACT

An action research project addressed the problem of inadequate student knowledge of writing strategies and students' negative attitudes toward the writing process. The targeted population consisted of early childhood, first grade, and third grade students in two growing, lower/middle class communities located in the western suburbs of a large midwestern city. The problems of poor writing strategies and negative attitudes were documented through writing skills/writing process checklists, student portfolio evaluations, student surveys, and parent questionnaires. Analysis of the probable cause data revealed that students may exhibit a lack of writing strategies and a negative attitude toward writing due to the absence of an environment that is conducive to writing, a lack of choice when writing, and feelings that the writing process is overwhelming. Student surveys and parent questionnaires suggested that little or no home involvement with the school contributed to this problem. A review of solution strategies suggested by the professional literature, combined with an analysis of the problem settings, resulted in the selection of three major interventions: implementation of writer's workshop, whole group activities to enhance the writing process, and the creation of a safe and predictable environment. Target students showed a positive response to the interventions. (Contains 23 references and 10 figures of data; appendixes contain survey instruments, writing checklist data, student portfolio samples, and student writing samples.) (Author/RS)

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ED 409 559

IMPROVING WRITING STRATEGIES THROUGH THE USE OF WRITER'S WORKSHOP

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master's of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

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This project is dedicated to all the children who participated in writer's workshop in our classrooms to make this research possible. We would also like to thank our family members for their understanding and support; without them, this would not have been possible.

Abstract

Authors: Kerri Boone
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Site: Geneva

Date: May, 1996

Title: Improving Writing Strategies and Student Attitude Toward the Writing Process

This research project addressed the problem of inadequate student knowledge of writing strategies and students' negative attitudes toward the writing process. The targeted population consisted of early childhood, first grade, and third grade students in two growing, lower/middle class communities located in the western suburbs of a large Midwestern city. The problems of poor writing strategies and negative attitudes were documented through writing skills/writing process checklists, student portfolio evaluations, student surveys, and parent questionnaires.

Analysis of the probable cause data revealed that students may exhibit a lack of writing strategies and a negative attitude toward writing due to the absence of an environment that is conducive to writing , a lack of choice when writing, and feelings that the writing process is overwhelming. Student surveys and parent questionnaires suggested that little or no home involvement contributed to this problem.

A review of solution strategies suggested by the professional literature, combined with an analysis of the problem settings, resulted in the selection of three major interventions: implementation of writer's workshop, whole group activities to enhance the writing process, and the creation of a safe and predictable environment.

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Chapter 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of Problem

The students of the targeted early childhood, first, and third grade classrooms exhibit poor writing strategies and a negative attitude toward the writing process. Evidence for the existence of this problem includes pre-writing and post-writing observations, student interviews, and the quality of writing samples.

Immediate Problem Context: School A

The student population of school A, which includes the targeted first and third grade classes, is 488. Of these students, 78 percent are White, 13 percent are African-American, 5 percent are Hispanic, and 4 percent are Asian-American. Approximately 2 percent of School A's students are eligible for bilingual education, and 15 percent of all students are considered low income. Low income students are from families receiving public aid, living in institutions for neglected or delinquent children, being supported in foster homes with public funds, or eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches. School A's attendance rate is 96.6 percent. The number of students who enroll or leave the school within the school year is 18.4 percent. Five students were

considered chronic truants; they were absent from school without valid cause for 10 percent or more of the school year (School District A Report Card, 1994-1995).

There are 47 staff members working together at School A. This includes 1 principal, 19 early childhood through sixth grade classroom teachers, 7 special area teachers, 5 special education teachers, 13 teaching assistants, 1 secretary, and 1 health aide. School A's professional staff characteristics are not available; therefore, the following data are district statistics. Fourteen years is the average teaching experience. Fifty-five percent of the district's teachers have Bachelor's degrees and 45 percent have Master's degrees (School District A Report Card, 1994-1995).

There are 18 elementary (K-6) classrooms, an early childhood classroom, an at-risk preschool classroom, a learning resource center with a connecting computer lab, a music room, an art room, and a gym. The gym is also used as a lunchroom and as needed for special programs (assemblies, spelling bees, etc.). There are three additional classrooms which are shared by Chapter I, ERS (Early Reading Success), and the inclusion program.

The elementary classrooms are heterogeneously grouped. Tracking is not done at any grade level. Most of School A uses a thematic/whole language approach to teaching with an emphasis on curriculum integration. School A also has a full inclusion program, with any assistance being provided within the classroom. A first and a third grade classroom from this school will be the target group for this action research project.

The Surrounding Community: School A

Surrounding community A is a Midwestern suburban community that is situated 23 miles west of a large city. The population is about 26,256 people, with an average income of approximately $59,000. The village offers a diverse housing selection. The average cost of a home in this area is $151,176. New real estate development is dominated by retail shopping centers, business parks, and single-family homes. The majority of the community population are blue-collar workers, with most only having a high school diploma (Meyers, 1994).

Community A children attend schools in one of five local elementary districts. The high school children in this community are all bused to a nearby community. The high school district has a high attendance rate, and the average American College Test (ACT) score is 22.8.

Community A's park district offers 200 acres of neighborhood parks and recreational areas spread throughout the village. The village is also adjacent to two of the largest forest preserves in the county. Together, these two preserves total almost 4,000 acres of land (Meyers, 1994).

There is currently an overcrowding issue in school district A. Due to a slow but steady population increase, school A is forced to deal with a shortage of classrooms each year. There is currently a district infrastructure committee in place that will look at overcrowding issues and other building needs. Community A is also considering a school referendum for the next election. Currently, $4553 is spent per student each year (School District A Report Card, 1994-1995).

Immediate Problem Context: School B

School B is one of five elementary buildings in the community. It has a student population of 543. This population consists of 75 percent White students, 5 percent African-American students, 13 percent Hispanic students, and 7 percent Asian students. Of these students, 21 percent of them come from families who are considered low-income and 11 percent are eligible for bilingual education. School B has a 95 percent attendance rate. The number of students who enroll or leave the school within the school year is 18 percent. Chronic truancy accounts for less than 1 percent of the population (Elementary District B School Report Card, 1994-1995).

There are 54 staff members working together at School B. This includes 2 administrators, 2 secretaries, 18 elementary teachers, 7 special education teachers, 12 assistants, 3 speech therapists, 2 bilingual teachers, 2 early childhood at-risk teachers, and a nurse and nurse assistant. School B's professional staff characteristics are not available; therefore the following data are district statistics. The average teaching experience is 17 years. Fifty-six percent of the teachers have bachelor's degrees and 44 percent have master's degrees or higher. (Elementary District B School Report Card, 1994-1995).

School B has 4 early childhood classrooms, 18 elementary classrooms (K-5), and 3 storage rooms. There is also a learning resource center and a computer lab. Computers are also available for classroom use. There are two gymnasiums and rooms available for art and music. The building has two playgrounds suitable for primary and intermediate age students.

The district's early childhood program is located in School B. There are four half-day sessions of early childhood special education offered daily. There is also early childhood at-risk programs in the building. These programs can service a total of 60 students. The target group in this research will be an afternoon session of the early childhood special education program. This session has ten students, all kindergarten age, with a wide variety of needs. One teacher and one teacher assistant are responsible for the students. These children may also receive services from a speech therapist, occupational therapist, and physical therapist. Services are determined on an individual basis.

Surrounding Community: School B

Surrounding Community B is just nineteen miles west of a major metropolitan area and has a population of 22,253. The median age of the residents is 33 years, and the average income is $53,944. Some of the homes were built in the early 1900's while others came in the late 1950's. The average home price is $125,403. There is a minimal amount of new development coming into this community. This community is comprised mainly of lower to middle class families, with a majority of blue collar workers.

The schools in community B consists of five elementary schools, two junior high schools, and one high school. The elementary and junior high schools are managed by one school district, while the high school is managed by a separate district. There is currently an overcrowding issue impacting school district B. Four out of the five elementary buildings are at or above capacity while one junior high has projected to be overcrowded by 1999. A Citizen's Advisory Committee was

formed to come up with solutions for this problem. At this time, the committee has suggested a variety of solutions and the superintendent has made her recommendations. One suggestion is to move boundaries with School B picking up the overflow from other schools. This has caused much controversy throughout the community. A decision on this issue will be made soon. At this time, $5574 is spent on each student per year (Elementary District B School Report Card, 1994-1995).

Regional and National Context of Problem

The problem of writing in the classroom has generated concern beyond the local level. According to Pinson (1995), "one of the hardest jobs we have as teachers is to take very verbal children and get them to write" (p.66). As teachers, we find this statement to be true. Many times students come into our classrooms eager to share stories verbally yet they are reluctant to write them down. We see this begin in the primary grades and continue throughout grade school.

Research shows that, "students aren't as comfortable with written communication" (Pinson, 1995, p. 66). Evidence of this has shown up in our classrooms. Students in the primary grades are overly concerned with letter formation and spelling, which interferes with the flow of ideas. In the intermediate grades, students seem to be focused on the length of composition and topic approval. Students in grades first and up are taught a formal writing approach to succeed at the Illinois Goal Assessment Program, which we feel may also add to a block in creativity and to writing discomfort.

It should be noted, however, that problems with the writing curriculum are not exclusive to the students. Research indicates that

teachers are unclear about methods to use when teaching writing. In a three year study, conducted by a team in Arizona, initial interviews showed that teachers, "had only a fuzzy notion of what the writing process meant" (Bratcher & Stroble, 1993, p. 6). They also encountered teachers using "mostly traditional writing instruction (more assigning than teaching and virtually no modeling)" (Bratcher & Stroble, 1993, p.6). Muccino (1986) also argues that, "while students are given frequent opportunities to practice writing stories, they receive little actual instruction in writing stories" (p. 15). This suggests that the focus of the writing curriculum should include more practice with writing strategies and less emphasis on the rote teaching methods of writing mechanics. To further support this theory, Manning & Manning (1994) states that "the research is absolutely clear on this point: formal grammar instruction has no influence on students' writing" (p.60). This would suggest that a writing program needs to be utilized that would involve the teacher as a knowledgeable facilitator, where students have a firm idea about what is expected.

In conclusion, the research that we studied lead us to believe that writing is a valuable part of the curriculum and needs to be addressed. Writing is a life skill that will be used far beyond one's school years. As Muccino (1986) summarized, " In the long run, the ability to communicate through writing will improve one's quality of life academically, socially, and even financially. A strong writer will have high self-esteem and the admiration of his or her peers" (p.1).

Chapter 2

PROBLEM EVIDENCE AND PROBABLE CAUSE

Problem Evidence

In order to investigate the problem of a negative attitude toward writing and poor writing skills, the researchers developed three instruments. They are: parent questionnaire, student survey, and developmental checklist. The parent questionnaires and student surveys were given in September of 1995 and will be readministered at the end of the study.

The parent questionnaires in first and third grade were completed at an open house at the school. The early childhood parent questionnaires were completed during individual home visits. The first and third grade questionnaires were the same, while the early childhood differed slightly due to the age difference. The first and third grade teachers had about 70% of the parents complete the questionnaires. All of the early childhood parent questionnaires were completed. A first grade copy of the parent questionnaire can be found in Appendix A, a third grade copy in Appendix B, and an early chilhood copy in Appendix C.

The early childhood and first grade students completed the survey with one-on-one assistance, while the third grade students

completed the surveys on their own with the teacher reading the questions out loud. Each of the three student surveys used varied in content to account for age appropriate skills. A blank copy of the first grade student survey is located in Appendix D, third grade appears in Appendix E, and early childhood appears in Appendix F. The developmental checklist will be used as an ongoing assessment. The student checklists will be kept in student portfolios, with each student being observed about once a month. Again, each grade level developed a checklist in order to meet the unique needs of each grade level. Copies of these developmental checklists can be found in Appendix G for first grade, Appendix H for third grade, and Appendix I for early childhood.

The parent questionnaires were used to evaluate the childrens' experiences with writing and the parents' perspectives on what their children's writing abilities are. The first and third grade parents parents of school A provided the information illustrated in Figure 1.

	Enjoys Writing	Sees People Write At Home	Spelling Interferes With Writing	Needs Help With Writing
1st Grade	Frequently:37% Sometimes:53% Rarely:10%	Frequently:37% Sometimes:53% Rarely:10%	Frequently:32% Sometimes:47% Rarely:21%	Yes: 58% No: 42%
3rd Grade	Frequently:36% Sometimes:50% Rarely:14%	Frequently:36% Sometimes:64% Rarely: 0%	Frequently:21% Sometimes:21% Rarely:58%	NOT APPLICABLE

Figure 1

Results of Parent Questionnaire: First & Third Grade

The above figure shows that 53% of school A's first graders and 50% of the third graders enjoy writing "sometimes." Although these percentages are quite positive, it was hoped that "frequently" percentages would have been higher. Similar results were found when the question concerning the opportunity children have to see people writing at home was asked. The figure also shows that 58% of the targeted first graders need help at home with writing. Parents did feel that spelling interferes significantly. First grade parents responded that 75% of the time spelling "sometimes" or "frequently" interferes with writing. Third grade parents responded that 42% of the time spelling "sometimes" or "frequently" interferes with writing.

After analyzing the information in Figure 1, three conclusions were pertinent to our research:

1. A little less than half of first and third grade students do not enjoy writing.

2. A large percentage of students do not have writing role models at home.

3. Spelling does interfere with writing.

The parents of school B provided the information in Figure 2, which appears below.

	Frequently	**Sometimes**	**Rarely**
Enjoys Drawing At Home	33%	45%	22%
Is Encouraged to Write at Home	33%	67%	0%
Sees People Write at Home	78%	22%	0%
	Yes	**No**	
Writes Own Name	22%	78%	
Parent Concerns About Writing	22%	78%	

Figure 2

Results of Parent Questionnaire: Early Childhood

The figure on the previous page indicates that 45% of the early childhood students "sometimes" enjoy drawing at home. As with the other targeted students in our study, it was hoped that the "frequently" percentages would be higher. The parents reported that they encouraged their child to write or draw "sometimes" 67% of the time and "frequently" 33% of the time. The parents did indicate that 78% "frequently" model writing for their children. When looking at specific skills, the table showed that only 22% of the students can write their own name. Despite these low percentages, only 22% of the parents expressed concerns about their child becoming a writer.

After analyzing the information from Figure 2, the researchers reached two significant conclusions.

1. Over half of the students are unable to write their first name.

2. Parents inconsistently encouraged their children to write or draw at home.

The student survey was used to determine the attitudes and experiences the targeted students had in writing. School A's student survey results are found in Figures 3 and 4, and also they are discussed in the narrative below. The results of school B's student survey are found in Figure 5.

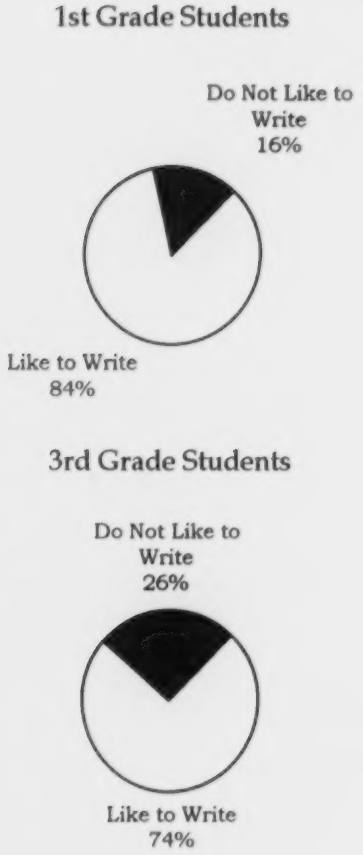

Figure 3: Attitudes toward Writing

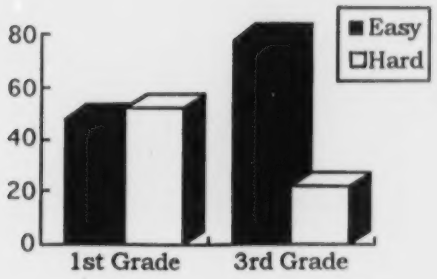

Figure 4: Perceptions about Writing

Figure 3 shows that 84% of school A first graders and 74% of third graders like to write. Figure 4 reveals that 52% of the first graders and 22% of the third graders found writing to be hard. The rest of the student survey asked questions that focused on the writing process. Almost every first and third grader agreed that writing had been learned at school or from someone at home. Although there were a variety of responses as to when children write, the overwhelming response was, "at school." It is also interesting to note that 39% of the third graders independently volunteered that their hand gets sore or tired when writing.

After analyzing the information from school A's student survey, three conclusions were reached:

1. Students enjoy writing, but find it hard.

2. The majority of student writing is done at school.

3. Many third graders believe that sore or tired hands made writing difficult.

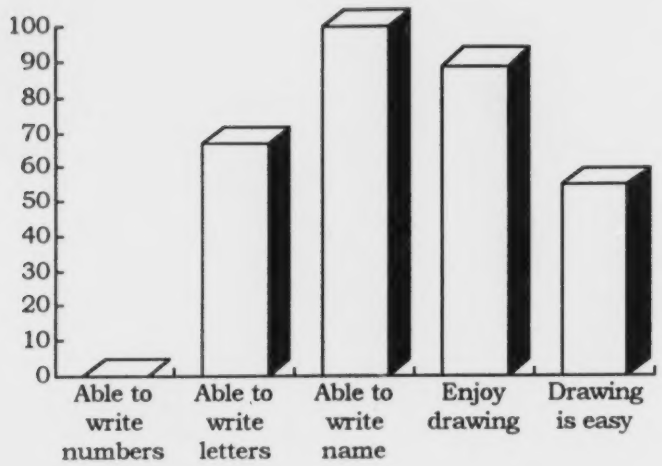

Figure 5: Early Childhood Student Survey Results

Figure 5 indicates that 89% of the targeted school B students enjoy drawing. Most said they like to draw with crayons or markers. They enjoyed drawing people and animals the most. All of the students reported they could write their name even though only 33% demonstrated that skill successfully when asked. When looking at the specific skill of writing letters, 67% of the children said they were able to do this. None of the students were able to write numbers at this time. Lastly, 55% of the students said drawing was easy for them.

After analyzing the above data, the researchers concluded that even though the children demonstrated poor writing skills, they still enjoy drawing and thought it was easy. We felt this inconsistency was due to their age.

As mentioned previously, the writing development checklist will be used as an on-going tool for assessment. The checklist has been

designed to evaluate the progress students are making in the areas of pre-writing, writing mechanics, and writing process. The raw data from the first round of observations has been compiled in tables that can be found in Appendix J for first grade, Appendix K for third grade, and Appendix L for early childhood.

The developmental checklists from school A show that all of the targeted first graders can print letters horizontally from left to right and 100% of the third graders leave spaces between words when writing. The "consistent" use of invented spelling in first grade is 16% and 84% in the third grade. When writing, 36% of the first graders and 45% of the third graders are able to sustain attention to their work. Only about half of the students in both first and third grade were willing to share their writing with the class.

The writing development checklist helped the researchers determine the following four conclusions:

1. All children are familiar with print.

2. Children in first grade are uncomfortable using invented spelling whereas the third graders use it often.

3. Over half of the students in first and third grade have a hard time sustaining attention when writing.

4. Most students are shy about sharing their writing at the beginning of the school year.

The data in Appendix L shows an analysis of the writing development checklist from school B. At this time, 89% of the students can draw pictures "sometimes" or "frequently" and 56% are beginning to scribble and print "mock" letters. The more complex tasks

of printing words, copying dictated words, using invented spelling, and writing conventional words have not emerged for any of the students. Half of the students in school B had moderate independence in drawing, while the rest exhibited little independence. When looking at concentration and interest in drawing, 78% showed either a moderate or great deal of interest. The student checklist also showed that 33% of the students can write all the letters in their first name, yet no students at this time show knowledge of writing their last name. When dictating stories to adults, 77% of the students either label pictures or completed three to six thoughts with a lot of prompting. Lastly, the teacher observed that 67% of the students paid no attention or scant attention to the writing being done for them.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the data at this time:

1. The early childhood students are truly at the pre-writing stage, with drawing pictures being their main form of written communication.

2. The early childhood students need more experience with writing first and last names and printing symbols.

3. When dictating stories, students pay little attention to the writing being modeled.

Probable Causes

Based on the results of the data collected above, it is evident that the students in school A and B exhibit poor writing strategies and a negative attitude toward writing. Although the difficult areas vary from grade level to grade level, there are consistent weaknesses present. Careful examinations of the data will show the patterns that were found.

After carefully reviewing the parent and student surveys from school A, we determined that many writing difficulties stemmed from the home environment. In order to collect more data on this subject, we analyzed student cumulative records, social worker referrals, and previous teacher verbal comments. This process revealed that the targeted children in school A had a variety of possible risk factors present in their homes. Of the targeted students, 32% live in single parent homes, 29% attend a daycare setting of some type daily, and 42% lack a consistent writing role model, based on the parent and student surveys. Although these factors do not always result in writing difficulties in isolation, the teachers in school A have observed that the many students fall into more than one category, and they are the students that have the most difficulty.

Another factor to consider at school A is the lack of confidence displayed by students. The student survey showed that 52% of the first graders and 22% of the third graders found writing to be difficult. Many parents indicated that this lack of confidence is due to the inability to spell correctly. As we observed, children are afraid to write because they feel threatened by the conventions of spelling.

The teachers of school A noted that many of the targeted students lack fine motor skills. The evidence for this is that 33% of first grade students currently visit fine motor class, and 28% of the third graders were previously enrolled in this program. Teachers have observed the lack of appropriate motor skills makes the writing process more difficult. Holding the pencil, forming letters, and writing for long periods of time seem to be specific concerns noted.

The final factor to consider for the targeted population of school A is the high mobility rate. Many students move in and out of the district due to the large percentage of apartments in the attendance area. Approximately 20% of the school population is new each year (School Report Card, 1993-1994). This hinders the writing process because children are coming from a wide variety of experiences, which many times do not coincide with the program that is currently used. Due to this, teachers spend much time reteaching and catching children up.

In contrast to school A, poor home environment does not seem to be a cause for poor writing strategies and negative attitudes in school B. Of the ten targeted students in this setting, all are living in homes with both parents present, who are actively involved with their education. When asked how often their child had the chance to see them writing, 78% stated "frequently." Thus, we needed to explore other reasons for poor writing skills.

When analyzing the data collected, the two causes that were most prevalent with this targeted group were less developed fine motor skills and lack of confidence. When drawing, 22% of the students add more details than just a person or scribbling. Often the details added are prompted by adults. Without prompts, 50% of the students scribbled, make circular motions, or lines on the paper. When writing, only 33% of the students can print their first name independently. This data, and the fact that 50% of the students receive occupational therapy, support the idea that lack of fine motor skills is a cause for poor writing.

Even though the student survey showed that 89% of the students enjoy drawing, and 55% consider drawing easy, lack of confidence is still evident when the students are performing these tasks. The students have been observed to give up easily and say, "I can't" when attempting to draw more elaborate pictures. The parents also noted that they often had to use encouragement to get their child to write.

Literature Review

The literature that we reviewed suggested many possible causes for the factors contributing to poor writing skills and a negative attitude toward writing. The three main causes that were found are a poor writing environment, lack of confidence with written communication, and the absence of a teacher role model. Together, these three factors can create an uncomfortable setting in which children must struggle to learn to be writers.

The absence of a stimulating and nurturing writing environment can be one of the primary causes for the development of poor writing skills. If the children within the classroom are not provided opportunities to collaborate and develop as a community of writers, they will be uncomfortable sharing ideas and stories (Freedman, 1995). In addition, students also need to be immersed in a literature-rich environment. Literature provides students who are uncomfortable with personal narratives the chance to write about stories they have been exposed to. Baker (1994) calls this technique "piggybacking," and suggests that without this exposure, children may have a much more difficult time with writing. Lastly, successful writing will not be

accomplished in an atmosphere that lacks a variety of writing tools (Bunce-Crim, 1991).

The next cause, lack of confidence, can be a result of several things. Children who are young and have minimal experiences with the writing process, often are not as comfortable with written communication (Pinson, 1995). For most children the writing process is very overwhelming (Cummings, 1994). In addition, poor fine motor skills only adds to this problem. According to Baker (1994), poor fine motor skills can make it difficult for even a strong reader to put his or her ideas onto paper. Finally, the mechanics of spelling and punctuation affects the confidence of students who are writing. Thus, Baker (1994) found that in her Writer's Workshop it took so long to help children sound out words that actual writing was not taking place.

Teachers who are not familiar with a variety of writing techniques may not be able to get all students to achieve their full writing potential. In a study done by Bratcher and Stroble, "teachers had only a fuzzy notion of what the writing process meant" (p. 6, 1993). If teachers are feeling uncomfortable with the writing process, students will sense this discomfort and may not have a positive experience. The absence of a predictable writing time is another condition that a teacher may fail to provide. Bunce-Crim states that, "Most productive writers establish a routine and write at the same time every day. This routine reminds the writer and others that writing is important" (p.38, 1991).

In conclusion, our probable causes are as follows:

1. Poor home environment
2. Lack of a writing role model

3. Poor fine motor skills
4. Lack of student confidence
5. Student mobility rate
6. Prior classroom experiences
7. Poor classroom environment
8. Teacher inexperience with writing process

Chapter 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Review of the Literature

After a review of the current research on writing, the researchers discovered that many of the suggested strategies for teaching writing had similar components. Most of the teaching methods were based on the early findings of Graves and Calkins (Avery, 1993). The current literature uses the same principles, with each researcher adding his or her own ideas.

Although different names were used to describe the writing process, the most common term used was "Writer's Workshop." This program is based on the idea that all children can and should write. Students are allowed to make choices when writing and are involved in the complete writing process (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1993).

The writing process is the core of most writing programs currently practiced. This process is a step-by-step approach that helps students construct meaning (Cooper, 1993). The steps sometimes varied by name, but the definitions were fairly consistent. The first step always includes selecting the topic through pre-writing activities.

These activities include things such as topic mapping (Cummings, 1994), using literature, and mini lessons (Hall, 1994). Step two is the writing of the rough draft. Step three usually involves proofreading and revising the rough draft. This can be done individually, in peer groups, or with the teacher. Publishing a finished piece is the fourth step in the writing process. Finally, the fifth step involves completing the published product with an audience (French, 1990). This process should begin as young as early childhood and continue throughout a child's educational experience. The role of the teacher during this process is to model, guide, and support the writing process until students take charge of their own writing (Cooper, 1993).

In the past, each subject area was taught as a separate and different entity. In schools today, the trend is quite the opposite. Teachers are encouraged to integrate subjects throughout the curriculum. Thus, in current literature, reading and writing seem to form a natural connection. According to Cooper (1993), reading and writing are both active processes, involve similar skills, promote communication, and when integrated, improve achievement. Some practical ways to incorporate reading and writing in the classroom are frequent read alouds by the teacher using a variety of authors, topics, and voices (Graves, 1983), using literature to spark ideas for writing, and creating class books.

In order for the writing process to be fully effective, most researchers suggested that classroom environment plays a critical role. Bunce-Crim (1993) warns that, " because writing and exposing one's own thoughts is risky business, children need to know that their

environment is a predictable and safe place for them to take risks" (p. 36). A review of the literature has shown three major components important to classroom environment: community, physical surroundings, and the role of the teacher.

According to Avery (1993), "true community requires that children be recognized as individuals and respected and valued as equals, people with rights, not as puppets to be controlled or manipulated" (p. 58). To form this community, Avery (1993) states that the two most important factors are talking and listening. This means children and teachers need to learn how to share with each other and be active listeners. When these two factors are actively practiced, trust is built, the key component for a community (Avery, 1993). Trust helps relationships grow and allows children to feel safe in their environment. Avery (1993) explains that, "building community begins on the first day of school" (p.59). As children begin work and play together, the development of a classroom community that creates a nurturing writing environment will begin.

The other side of creating the proper environment for writing involves the physical surroundings of the classroom. Most importantly, Manning and Manning (1994) stresses that a classroom should have an abundance of children's literature. A wide variety of genres, along with books that represent a range of difficulty, should be available in the classroom (Beeler, 1993). Beeler (1993) also suggests that a writing center be set up in the classroom. The writing center should be filled with a, "wide variety of materials which invite children to explore writing in many different forms" (p.12). Materials such as an assortment of writing tools, paper of all kinds and sizes, envelopes, a

typewriter, magnetic letters, pasta letters, and a computer will make the writing center appealing (Beeler, 1993).

Another aspect that should be included in the classroom environment is the display of print. Information sources such as maps, charts, and pictures, as well as examples of teacher and student print should be posted all over the classroom (Beeler, 1993). A print rich environment helps children see the importance and functionality of writing. A newer trend in making the environment safe is to provide children with an Author's Chair. This is a special chair, for children only, to share writing pieces with others (Hall, 1994).

The role the teacher plays in the classroom is another critical element for a successful writing environment. As mentioned earlier, the role of the teacher is to guide, support, and facilitate the writing process. This encompasses a variety of responsibilities. The teacher needs to create an environment in which children can bring their lives into the classroom (Calkins, 1991). A teacher can do this by setting up a consistent routine that allows each child the chance to express himself or herself in writing and during sharing times (Bunce-Crim, 1991). The educator needs to understand that, "providing an environment supportive of a child's developing literacy is a way of thinking. It is not a teaching technique to be carried out in a specific way" (Beeler, 1993, p.17).

Once the positive environment is established in the classroom, the teacher should prepare himself/herself to be an integral part of the writing process. First, the teacher must help students collect data and organize materials using pre-writing techniques, such as group brainstorming, charting, and webbing (Zemelman et al., 1993). Then as

each student is working through the process of pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing, the teacher is modeling and sharing along with the students (Graves, 1983). This includes taking the opportunity to read aloud of ten to the students (Baker, 1994).

During the process the teacher is actively listening and responding to each student, which Avery (1993) feels is the heart of a good teacher. The art of listening and responding is crucial in the conferencing component which takes place during the drafting and editing stages. Conferencing provides the opportunity for the teacher to find out about the individual needs of each child (Graves, 1983). Conferencing should not be sessions in which teachers fix students' work but instead a time to ask students about their ideas and thought processes. A time, also, to work on self-goal setting, self-evaluation, and reflecting on what has been learned (Zemelman et al., 1993).

Giving students the freedom to choose their own topics helps to establish ownership in writing projects, yet teachers may feel pressured on when and how to teach specific writing skills. Avery (1993) suggests mini-lessons, presented in an interesting manner, can be the solution to this problem. Mini-lessons are conducted in ten to fifteen minute intervals and can deal with topics such as punctuation, capitalization, and paragraph structures.

If a teacher chooses the methods described above and truly believes in this way of thinking, there will be an added benefit to using these writing techniques; the increase in each child's self-esteem. When children write about their own experiences and concerns it makes them feel that their ideas are important (Cramer, 1992; Pinson, 1995). Hall (1994) agrees with this statement and feels writer's

workshop boosts self- esteem by helping students see themselves as authors and their work as literature. Lastly, allowing children the freedom to write at their own pace and about meaningful topics makes writing a channel for enjoyment and negotiation, both being confidence boosters (Zemelman et al., 1993).

Not only do modern experts in writing suggest that students in be given control over what they write, but they also encourage teachers to provide students with a choice over the tools they use (Klenow, 1992). With all of the current technological advances in education, the newest tool to include in a writing classroom in the computer. Even if only a limited number of computers are available, students might still have the opportunity to use a word processing program to publish their work after first creating drafts in longhand. Through this process, children are treated like real writers. "Word processing gives the user a large degree of freedom when creating documents. With many different options available, time is used more efficiently. The finished product can resemble a professional typeset document" (Shepard-Hayes, 1995, p.21).

For teachers who are fortunate enough to be in a technologically advanced schools, where hardware, beyond word processing is available, there are more options. Once students have written a manuscript there are ways to have children illustrate their work using more than crayons or markers. Scanners, which allow the user to take a picture of an object or image and then place that image back to the computer, are available. Student projects can be greatly enhanced because special images, photos, and drawings can be scanned into any

given document. The finished project can be highly motivating to young authors (Shepard-Hayes, 1995).

Another option for children's publishing is the digital camera. The digital camera is similar to a normal 35 millimeter camera, but it produces images in digital form instead of on film. Once a picture is taken, it is stored inside the camera until the user retrieves the picture and transfers it onto the computer (Shepard-Hayes, 1995). A student who is able to include personal photographs into his/her own writing finds the writing to be more authentic and meaningful.

The concept of "Power Writing" proved to be the only drastically different approach to teaching writing that we found. This strategy, developed by J.E. Sparks (1995), is extremely systematic and provides the writer with a stage-by-stage guide for writing. The beginning step is the mastery of a three sentence paragraph and the final stage is the understanding of how to create a seven paragraph essay. Each stage is carefully designed and precisely explained, leaving very little room for personal style. The goals of this program appear to be brevity, unity, coherence, and clarity, not imagination or motivation.

The basis of power writing is assigning numerical values to words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs. 1st powers are main ideas, 2nd powers are major details, and 3rd powers are minor details. Students then use these powers in varying orders and with varying complexity to create documents appropriate to their grade level (Sparks, 1995). For example, in its simplest form, students are given the 1st power sentence and then they must add 2nd power sentences in order to complete a three sentence paragraph (Sparks, 1995).

Although this numerical "blueprint" provides teachers with a plan for teaching students how to write logically and clear, it is also limiting the natural ability children have to make choices and think creatively. Power writing forces children to fit their ideas into an already existing format, whereas the other methods discussed allow children to choose their own topic and progress in any direction they choose.

Project Outcomes and Solution Components

As a result of the implementation of the writer's workshop and whole-group creative writing activities, during the period of September 1995 to January 1996, the targeted early childhood, first, and third grade students will increase their ability to use writing strategies and show an improvement in their attitude toward the writing process, as measured by checklists, portfolio evaluations, student surveys, and parent questionnaires.

In order to accomplish the terminal objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Components of writer's workshop will be developed and implemented in the targeted classrooms.

2. Whole-group activities that enhance the writing process will be developed and implemented to build a community of writers.

3. A safe and predictable environment will be created in order to improve student attitude toward writing and further develop writing strategies.

Action Plan for the Intervention

A. Population

1. Early Childhood-setting B
2. First Grade- setting A
3. Third Grade- setting A

B. Writer's Workshop Components

1. Purpose:

The use of writers workshop will increase student use of writing strategies. The developmental and individual processes of writers workshop will foster a positive attitude toward writing.

2. Schedule:

We will implement writers workshop from the time period of September 1995 to January 1996. The early childhood and first grade classrooms will use writer's workshop daily for 30-45 minutes. The third grade classroom will use writer's workshop three times a week for one hour.

3. Activities:

a. Numerous writing tools and materials need to be available.

b. Have an abundance of children's literature available.

c. Teacher reads aloud to class daily.

d. Set up a print rich environment.

e. Writing process is modeled by the teacher and then used by students during writing time.

f. Mini-lessons will be used frequently to teach writing

skills and the writing process (skills covered: emergent writing skills, illustrations, mechanics, grammar, story format, spelling, and word patterns).

g. An author's chair will be used for sharing of student work.

h. Students will have the opportunity to use a computer for publishing.

C. Whole-group Creative Writing Activities

1. Purpose:

Whole-group activities will further foster the writing process and build a community of writers.

2. Schedule:

All three targeted classrooms will engage in whole-group writing activities a minimum of once a month.

3. Activities:

a. Make class "big books" that coincide with curricular topics.

b. Class stories will be written on chart paper with help from the whole group.

c. Thematic word lists, which may help students in the pre-writing process, will be created by the whole class.

D. Create a Safe and Predictable Environment

1. Purpose:

The established environment will improve student attitude toward writing and further develop writing strategies.

2. Schedule:

A safe and predictable environment will be set up and maintained in all three target classrooms from September 1995 to January 1996.

3. Activities:

a. Make the room arrangement conducive to a writing community.

b. Set up a consistent routine from the beginning.

c. Model and teach children to value other's work and be a good audience (eye contact, sitting still, and constructive comments).

d. Teach children to use "energizers" (thumbs up, round of applause, etc.).

e. Have an accessible writing center available at all times.

Methods of Assessment

In order to asses the effects of the intervention, the following data collections will be used:

1. A writing skills/writing process checklist will be kept in student portfolios as an on-going assessment of each child's growth. Each child will be observed about once a month.

2. Parents will be asked to complete the same questionnaire at the beginning and end of the study to see if parents have noted a change in attitude toward writing.

3. A student survey will be used at the beginning and end of the study to see if there is a change in their attitude toward writing.

4. A portfolio evaluation will be completed by the targeted students as a self-evaluation tool.

Chapter 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of Intervention

The objective of this project was to increase early childhood, first grade, and third grade students' abilities to use writing strategies and improve their attitude toward the writing process. The implementation of writer's workshop and whole-group creative writing activities were selected to effect the desired changes.

Writer's workshop was implemented to increase students use of writing strategies. It was also hoped that the developmental and individual processes of writer's workshop would foster a positive attitude toward writing. Original plans called for writer's workshop to be carried out during the time period of September 1995 to January 1996. All three targeted classrooms began on schedule. However, due to student interest, writer's workshop will be continued through the remainder of the school year. The post data collection for the research occurred at the end of March 1996.

The action plan stated that the early childhood and first grade classrooms would be involved in writer's workshop daily for 30-45 minutes. Two weeks into the intervention the frequency of writer's workshop decreased in early childhood from four days to three days,

and in first grade from five days to four days. This was necessitated due to scheduling conflicts. The third grade classroom also had to make adaptations due to scheduling conflicts. Originally writer's workshop was scheduled three days a week for one hour. After three weeks this was modified to five days a week in 30 minute increments.

Before the researchers could begin writer's workshop, a print-rich environment needed to be established. In all three settings, targeted students were exposed to the printed word in a variety of ways. Although each classroom was filled with an abundance of print, each targeted grade level had distinct features. The early childhood classroom had labels for common objects in the classroom, word lists were displayed in pocket charts, and popular chants and songs were hung on wall charts. The first grade classroom had grade level high frequency words displayed on posters and extensively used pocket charts to showcase words, books, and poems related to units of study. In the third grade classroom much emphasis was placed on using written language to direct daily activities. The children were responsible for reading the helpers chart, the scheduling chart, the morning routine, and varying daily tasks.

To compliment the print-rich environment, all three targeted classrooms had an extensive classroom library. In addition, books related to topics of study were displayed in an attractive manner, accessible to each student. The teacher reading aloud daily to students was also part of the routine in all three classrooms.

The most important component of the intervention was the introduction of writing strategies. All three researchers taught the writing process in a developmentally appropriate manner. This process

was modeled by the teacher frequently. This, in turn, was expected to appear in the daily writings of each student. The weaknesses that researchers noted in student's writing were addressed through mini-lessons, which were taught prior to a writer's workshop session. In early childhood mini-lessons lasted five to ten minutes with an emphasis on the drawing process and connecting written words with pictures. First grade mini-lessons lasted ten to fifteen minutes with a primary focus on writing mechanics. Lastly, third grade mini-lessons lasted ten to fifteen minutes with advanced grammatical structures and adding detail to writing being stressed.

The use of computers to aid in publishing finished pieces of writing was described as an intervention in the action plan. Unfortunately, due to lack of both computers and appropriate publishing software, we were unable to follow through with this plan. In order to make finished pieces more attractive, children were instead provided with decorated writing paper and special writing instruments such as thin-tip markers or ball-point pens.

Creating a safe and predictable environment was another major component of the action plan. The researchers hoped the established classroom environment would improve students' attitudes toward writing and further develop writing strategies. All three targeted classrooms were able to set up and maintain the characteristics needed for a positive writing environment. This included a room arrangement conducive to a writing community with key elements being a writing center and a group area where sharing took place. An author's chair was the central focus of this meeting place. In order to make sharing time a safe experience for all students, each grade level

established ground rules on how children should value other's work and be a good audience. In early childhood and first grade the emphasis was on sitting still and being attentive. Third grade also focused on being attentive, as well as providing constructive criticism. In addition all three targeted classrooms utilized "energizers" as a way to provide positive feedback to the author and make him/her feel accepted. See Appendix M for a complete list of "energizers" used. Finally, a consistent routine added to the predictability of the environment. Writer's workshop and sharing time were carried out at the same time and in the same manner in all three targeted classrooms.

The last intervention in the action plan was whole-group creative writing activities. The researchers hoped this would further foster the writing process and help to build a community of writers. Original plans called for all three targeted classrooms to engage in whole-group writing activities a minimum of once a month. The early childhood group exceeded these expectations by completing a whole-group activity at least once a week. The first and third grade classrooms followed the action plan by completing one whole-group activity once a month. Examples of whole-group activities in all three targeted classrooms included class "big books" that coincided with the curriculum, class stories written on chart paper, and thematic word lists which helped students with the pre-writing process. In addition to the original action plan, the early childhood and third grade classrooms completed individual books as culminating activities to topics of study.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess the effects of writer's workshop and whole-group writing activities four instruments were used. A parent questionnaire and student survey were used to collect pre and post data, whereas the developmental checklist was used as an ongoing assessment maintained throughout the intervention. Refer to Appendices A-I to review these original documents. A portfolio evaluation was also completed by the early childhood and first grade students as a self-evaluation tool. The third grade students were unable to use this evaluation tool due to district mandated forms.

The parent questionnaire was readministered in March 1996 to assess parent perceptions about growth in their child's writing abilities. The early childhood, first, and third grade parent questionnaires were sent home with the students to be completed. The number of parent questionnaires returned in March 1996 was similar to the quantity returned in September 1996. The first and third grade teachers had approximately 70% of the parents complete the questionnaire whereas all of the early childhood questionnaires were completed.

The first and third grade parents of School A provided the following post intervention information which is illustrated in figure 6 on the following page.

	Enjoys Writing	Sees People Write At Home	Spelling Interferes With Writing	Needs Help With Writing
1st Grade	Frequently:47% Sometimes:53% Rarely:0%	Frequently:40% Sometimes:60% Rarely:0%	Frequently:14% Sometimes:33% Rarely:53%	Yes: 33% No: 67%
3rd Grade	Frequently:38% Sometimes:52% Rarely:10%	Frequently:43% Sometimes:52% Rarely:5%	Frequently:0% Sometimes:38% Rarely:62%	NOT APPLICABLE

Figure 6

Post Results of Parent Questionnaire: First & Third Grade

The above figure shows that 53% of School A's first graders and 52% of the third graders enjoy writing "sometimes." Although the first graders "sometimes" results did not change when compared to September 1995 data, it is interesting to note that in September 1995 10% "rarely" enjoyed writing, and in March 1996 this percentage dropped to 0%. The third graders from school A "frequently" and "sometimes" results both increased by 2% in "enjoys writing." The pre and post data regarding students seeing people write at home stayed about the same. The table also shows that 33% of the targeted first graders need help at home with writing. This is a significant drop from the 58% that needed help in September 1995. In September 1995, first

grade parents responded that 75% of the time spelling "sometimes" or "frequently" interferes with writing. Again, a significant drop was noted. The above data indicates that first graders only "sometimes" or "frequently" have spelling interfere with writing 47% of the time. Third grade parents responded that 38% of the time spelling "sometimes" or "frequently" interferes with writing, which is not a significant change when compared to the 42% in September 1995.

After analyzing the information in Figure 6 and comparing it to pre intervention data three conclusions were found:

1. Spelling interfered less with writing after interventions.
2. Students enjoyment with writing increased slightly.
3. First graders found it easier to write independently after the interventions.

The parents of School B provided the information in Figure 7.

	Frequently	**Sometimes**	**Rarely**
Enjoys Drawing At Home	44%	44%	12%
Is Encouraged to Write At Home	67%	33%	0%
Sees People Write At Home	78%	22%	0%
	Yes	**No**	
Writes Own Name	78%	22%	
Parent Concerns About Writing	33%	67%	

Figure 7

Post Results of Parent Questionnaire: Early Childhood

The figure above indicates that 44% of early childhood students "frequently" enjoy drawing at home. This is an 11% increase over the results found in September 1995. As reported in September 1995, the parents stated that they encouraged their children to write or draw "sometimes" 67% of the time and "frequently" 33% of the time. The data found in the above table shows just the opposite, with parents "sometimes" encouraging their children 33% of the time and "frequently" 67% of the time. Parents indicate that they model writing

at home 78% of the time. This data remained consistent with that found in September 1995. When examining the skill of name writing, the table shows that 78% of the students write his/her name at home. This is a significant increase compared to the pre-test results in which only 22% of the students could write his/her name. Lastly, 33% of the parents expressed concerns about their children becoming writers, which is an 11% increase over the results found in September 1995.

After analyzing the information in Figure 7, three significant conclusions were drawn.

1. All but two students now demonstrate the ability to write his/her name at home.

2. After the interventions, the parents are now encouraging the children to write at home on a regular basis.

3. Parents are now more concerned about their children becoming writers.

The student survey was used to determine the attitudes and experiences the targeted students had in writing. As with the parent questionnaire, the student survey was conducted twice, once in September 1995 and again in March 1996. School A's student survey results from March 1996 are found in Figures 8 and 9. The results of School B's student survey from March 1996 are found in figure 10. A narrative discussing post data results follows each figure.

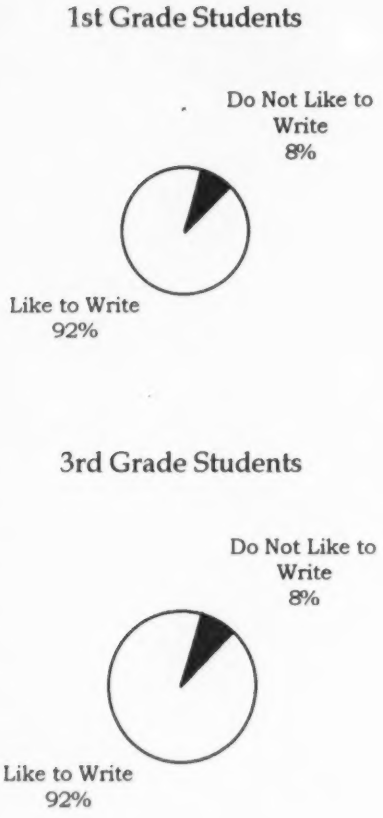

Figure 8

Post Survey Attitudes Toward Writing

Figure 8 shows that 92% of school A first graders and 92% of school A third graders like to write. In first grade students this is an 8% increase from September 1995, and in third grade students it is an 18% increase from September 1995.

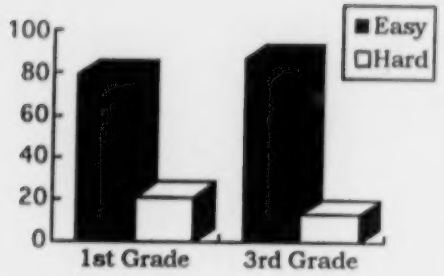

Figure 9

Post Survey Perceptions Toward Writing

Figure 9 reveals that 21% of the first graders and 13% of the third graders found writing to be "hard." The first graders showed a more substantial decrease with 52% of the students finding it "hard" to write in September 1995. Although the decrease was not as significant with the third graders, a 9% decrease was noted. The rest of the student survey asked questions that focused on the writing process. When the September 1995 data was analyzed and compared to March 1996 data, the results were found to be very similar: first and third graders still responded that writing had been learned by someone at home or at school. Also, first and third graders again responded that the majority of their writing is done "at school."

After analyzing the post data information from School A's student survey, two conclusions were reached:

1. Students in both first and third grades really enjoy writing, with few students finding it to be "hard."

2. The majority of student writing continues to be done at school.

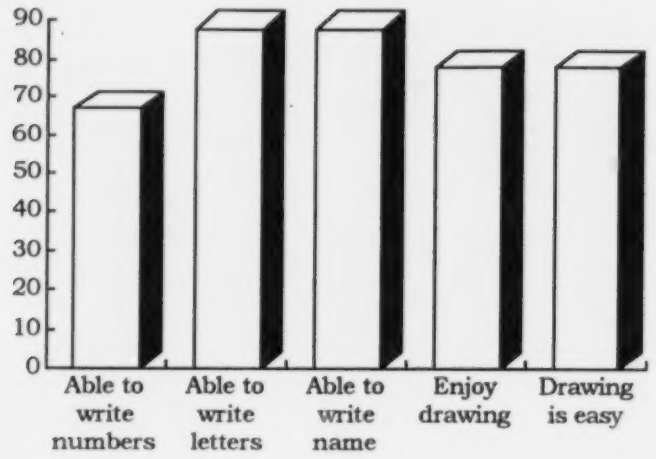

Figure 10

Post Survey Early Childhood Results

Figure 10 indicates that 78% of the targeted early childhood students enjoy drawing. This is a slight decrease from the data collected in September 1995. The students once again indicated markers and crayons as their favorite writing tools. As shown in the above figure, 88% of the students can now write their name independently. The students more accurately assessed their ability to write their name in March 1996: thus the reason for the drop in data. When looking at the specific skill of letter writing, 88% of the children reported that they were able to do this. This is a 10% increase from the initial survey results. When analyzing and comparing the skill of number writing, the students who indicated they had the ability to write numbers rose from 0% to 67%. Lastly, 78% of the students

report that drawing is "easy" for them. This is a 23% increase from September 1995.

After analyzing the post data information from School B's student survey, three conclusions were drawn:

1. After interventions, the students are more perceptive of their own writing abilities and can describe their skills more accurately.

2. Students found drawing to be easier after interventions took place.

3. Students gained the ability to write letters and numbers independently.

As already explained, the writing development checklist was used as an ongoing tool for assessment. The checklist was designed to assess the progress students made in the areas of pre-writing, writing mechanics, and the writing process. The raw data from the last round of observations has been compiled in tables that can be found in an appendix. First grade data is in Appendix N, third grade data is in Appendix O, and early childhood is in Appendix P.

The post developmental checklist from School A shows that first and third grade students improve their writing, both in mechanics and process. The three most obvious changes in first grade students writing mechanics are increases in the ability to leave spaces between words, use invented spelling, and use a capital letter for "I." The third grade students ability to use writing mechanics increased steadily in all areas, but "paragraph sense" is the most dramatic increase. The increase went from 13% "consistently" using paragraphs in September 1995, to 26% using paragraphs "consistently" in March 1996.

For first grade students, the writing process developed dramatically in two areas. Students were able to self-select writing topics in March 1996 80% better than they did in September 1995. Also, sharing writing with the group went up 80%; in September 1995 21% "consistently" shared writing, whereas 100% "consistently" shared writing in March 1996. Although there were significant increases in other areas, these were expected due to the developmental milestones of first graders and not attributed directly to the interventions. In addition, third grade students showed growth in two areas. Being able to write on a "focused topic" increased from 17% in September 1995 to 35% in March 1996. Third graders were also able to "use descriptions and details" much more effectively. This percentage rose from 22% in September 1995 to 39% in March 1996. When analyzing the data, researchers noted that there was one area in particular that both first and third graders improved in consistently. Both targeted groups increased their ability to "sustain attention to writing." First graders went from 38% to 67%, and third graders went from 22% to 45%.

The post writing developmental checklist helped us determine the following four conclusions:

1. Children in first grade were using invented spelling much more after the interventions began.

2. First and third grade students increased their ability to sustain attention to writing tasks.

3. First grade students were all willing to share their writing.

4. Third grade students found it much less difficult to focus on a topic after the intervention.

The data in Appendix P shows an analysis of the post writing development checklist. At this time, 67% of the students "frequently" draw pictures, whereas in September 1995 only 11% completed this task. The data also shows that 44% of the students can scribble and print mock letters "frequently." This is a significant gain since the initial data collection. The early childhood students showed growth in two more areas dealing with the writing process. Of this group, 55% can "sometimes" or "frequently" copy printed words and 56% can "sometimes" copy dictated words. The ability to use invented spelling and write conventional words has not emerged yet, which remains consistent with the data found in September 1995. There was a dramatic increase in the ability to draw independently, which rose from 0% to 56%. When looking at concentration and interest in drawing, 100% of the students now show a "moderate" or "great deal" of interest compared to 78% in September 1995.

Some of the most notable changes from the initial checklist data are in the areas of name writing. In March 1996, 88% of the students can write all the letters in their first name and 67% can write one to two or several letters in their last name. The early childhood students have also become more proficient at dictating stories to adults. They went from primarily labeling pictures and expressing three to six thoughts with a lot of prompting to a majority of the group expressing three to six thoughts with minimal or no prompting. Lastly, the majority of the students have moved from paying "no" or "scant" attention to paying "general" attention to writing being done for them.

The following three conclusions can be drawn from this post data:

1. The majority of the early childhood students are now able to write their first name.

2. The early childhood students are still in the pre-writing stage, but after the interventions they are now making connections between pictures and written words.

3. When dictating stories, students have become more aware and pay general attention to the writing being modeled.

In addition to the three assessments described above, student portfolio evaluations were periodically completed by the targeted students in early childhood and first grade as a self-evaluation tool during the intervention period. The portfolio evaluations helped the teachers determine how the students felt about their writing. The early childhood students completed the portfolio evaluation sheet once a month during a teacher/student writing conference. The following information was obtained from this evaluation: feelings about the piece of writing and favorite aspects of the story. At this level, the most informative part of the evaluation was having the students describe their favorite parts of a story. The questions relating to feelings were too abstract for this age level. They answered "yes" most of the time, showing an inability to distinguish between good and bad stories.

The first grade portfolio evaluation was also completed once a month, after students revised and made a final draft of a story. The teacher was able to gather the following information from the evaluations: feelings about writing, best part of story, goals for improvement, and feelings about sharing writing. Due to the fact that

childrens' answers to questions changed from evaluation to evaluation, the researcher concluded that children were not threatened by the evaluation and provided honest answers. Examples of completed portfolio evaluations for first grade can be found in Appendix Q. The early childhood evaluations can be found in Appendix R. As noted earlier, the third grade students did not complete portfolio evaluations, but copies of student writing samples are found in Appendix S.

Lastly, our intervention included whole group writing activities. One major part of these whole group writing activities was creating class books. The success of class books was determined by responses found on the student surveys. When the early childhood, first grade, and third grade students were asked if they liked completing class books, 100% of the students responded "yes." The same response was found when the students if they liked reading class books.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and analysis of the data on writer's workshop, the targeted students showed a positive response to the interventions. The majority of the students exhibited growth in writing strategies, and their attitude toward writing improved. Although the children involved were in a varity of grades and performed at various ability levels, the interventions were successful in all three targeted classrooms.

The researchers believe that the success of writer's workshop was strongly influenced by establishing a consistent routine within a safe and predictable environment. Because of this atmosphere, children were willing to take risks and were enthusistic about the writing process. The researchers were pleasingly surprised when

students looked forward to writer's workshop days. In some cases, students even worked on writing during free time or requested permission to take pieces home. Lastly, researchers felt that the secure environment prompted students to enjoy the "sharing" aspect of the intervention.

Another significant influence was the developmentally appropriate approach that was taken during writer's workshop. Children were not forced to complete tasks that were beyond their individual capabilities. Although children were held responsible for participating during writer's workshop, each child was at a different stage in the writing process at any given time. The flexible arrangement allowed the teacher time to help students who needed extra support, while other students continued at thier own pace.

To keep consistent with the developmentally appropriate approach that is needed in a writer's workshop classroom, the reseachers implemented mini-lessons. The implementation of mini-lessons allowed the researchers to address specific writing skills that needed to be introduced or reviewed. Rather than following grade level textbook guidelines in writing and grammar, the teachers observed students during the writing process to see what skills were needed. After skills were decided upon, the teachers were able to design mini-lessons that were relevant to the students, brief, and interesting to the class. The researchers concluded that the majority of students improved some writing skills due to the success of mini-lessons.

A nice compliment to writer's workshop was the use of whole group activities. Class books were the most successful aspect of these activities. Children enjoyed the process of writing a class book and

were always proud of the finished product. Many times class books were chosen over trade books during free reading time in the classroom. These books were also a creative means to connect writing with thematic studies.

Although the researchers were pleased with the outcomes of the interventions, there were some aspects of the plan that caused minor complications. To proper introduce a writer's workshop program in a classroom much time is needed. Time is needed in two ways. First, time is needed to set up and have all components of writer's workshop in place. This involves a material-rich writing center, a filing or organizational system to store pieces of student writing, and the creation of authenic assessment tools appropriate to the grade level. Once these things are in place, a consistent routine/schedule needs to be established. This can be difficult because a large block of time, which is needed for writer's workshop, is not readily available in most elementary classrooms. The researchers found that time had to be adjusted due to pull-out programs, "specials" schedules (i.e. Art, Music, Gym, etc.), and curricular demands.

Another frustration that occured for the researchers was the inability to raise some of the lower-achieving students' attitudes toward writing. Of the students whose opinions did not become more positive, the teacher noted a direct correlation between negative responses on the student survey and low-achieving writers. These negative attitudes were a result of poor fine motor skills, low reading ability, and being unable to focus on the writing process. Due to these unavoidable conditions, there were always be students in the classroom to challenge the teacher during writer's workshop.

Overall, the researchers were extremely impressed with the outcomes of the interventions. Not only will the writer's workshop program be continued next year in all three targeted classrooms, but the researchers plan on sharing the techniques that made this project a success. School A and School B are currently exploring writer's workshop as an approach to teaching writing. Therefore, the researchers will initially share the results of the study with grade level teams. The researchers are especially excited about providing others in their schools with the unique components of this action plan that made it popular among students.

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First Grade Parent Writing Questionnaire

Name _____ **Date**_____

Please circle or check the most appropriate answer.

1) Does your child enjoy writing?

rarely sometimes frequently

2) Does your child have the opportunity to see you writing at home?

rarely sometimes frequently

3) Does your child write at home?

rarely sometimes frequently

4) If your child does write at home, does he/she write:

independently with your help

5) What does your child enjoy writing?

____ ABCs
____ his/her name and family member names
____ familiar words from books, tv, etc.
____ stories
____ other:

6) Is your child willing to share his/her writing?

rarely sometimes frequently

7) Do you think spelling interferes with your child's writing?

rarely sometimes frequently

8) Do you have concerns about your child becoming a writer?

rarely sometimes frequently

9) Please feel free to add any additional comments about your child's writing.

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for your help!

THIRD GRADE PARENT WRITING QUESTIONNAIRE

Name _____ **Date**_____

Please circle or check the most appropriate answer.

1) Does your child enjoy writing?

rarely sometimes frequently

2) Does your child have the opportunity to see you writing at home?

rarely sometimes frequently

3) Does your child write at home?

rarely sometimes frequently

4) If your child does write at home, does he/she write:

independently with your help

5) What does your child enjoy writing?

____ ABCs
____ his/her name and family member names
____ familiar words from books, tv, etc.
____ stories
____ other:

6) Is your child willing to share his/her writing?

rarely sometimes frequently

7) Do you think spelling interferes with your child's writing?

rarely sometimes frequently

8) Do you have concerns about your child becoming a writer?

rarely sometimes frequently

9) Please feel free to add any additional comments about your child's writing.

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for your help!

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

NAME_____

DATE_____

PLEASE CIRCLE THE MOST APPROPRIATE ANSWER.

THANKS!

1. DOES YOUR CHILD ENJOY DRAWING?

   RARELY SOMETIMES FREQUENTLY

2. DO YOU ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO WRITE OR DRAW?

   RARELY SOMETIMES FREQUENTLY

3. DOES YOUR CHILD TELL A STORY ABOUT HIS/HER PICTURE?

   RARELY SOMETIMES FREQUENTLY

   IF YES, DO THEY DO SO a) INDEPENDENTLY

   OR b) with your encouragement

4. DOES YOUR CHILD WRITE HIS/HER OWN NAME?

   RARELY SOMETIMES FREQUENTLY

5. DOES YOUR CHILD ASK YOU TO WRITE FOR HIM/HER?

   RARELY SOMETIMES FREQUENTLY

6. DOES YOUR CHILD ATTEMPT TO WRITE LETTERS OR SCRIBBLE WORDS?

RARELY SOMETIMES FREQUENTLY

7. DOES YOUR CHILD HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE YOU WRITING? (i.e. letters, notes, lists etc..)

RARELY SOMETIMES FREQUENTLY

8. DO YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR CHILD BECOMING A WRITER?

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Appendix D

First Grade Student Survey

Name _____ Date_____

1) Do you know how to write stories? _____

2) How did you learn to write?

_____

_____

3) Why do you think people write?

_____

_____

4) Write something for me.

5) Tell me what you wrote.

_____

_____

6) Do you like to write? _____

7) Is writing easy or hard? _____

8) When do you write? _____

_____

9) What do you like to write about? _____

_____

10) Do you ever draw pictures to go with your writing? _____

11) Do you like to have other people read your writing? _____

12) Do the people in your family write? _____

13) What do the people in your family write? _____

_____

_____

14) Have you ever been a part of making a class book? _____

15) If yes, do you like making class books? _____

16) If yes, do you like reading class books? _____

17) Do you have any other comments about your writing?

_____

_____

Appendix E

THIRD GRADE STUDENT SURVEY

NAME_____ DATE _____

1) Do you know how to write stories? _____

2) How did you learn to write? _____

_____

3) Why do you think people write? _____

_____

4) Do you like to write? _____

5) Is writing easy or hard? _____

6) When do you write? _____

_____

7) What do you like to write about? _____

_____

8) Do you like to choose your own topic to write about? _____

9) Do you ever draw pictures to go with your writing? _____

10) Do you like to have others read your writing? _____

11) Do people in your family write? _____

12) What do the people in your family write? _____

_____

_____

13) Have you ever helped to make a class book? _____

14) If you have, did you enjoy it? _____

15) If you have, did you like reading it? _____

16) Can you tell me anything else about your writing? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

STUDENT SURVEY
EARLY CHILDHOOD

NAME_____

DATE_____

1. DO YOU LIKE TO DRAW PICTURES?

YES

NO

2. MY FAVORITE THING TO DRAW IS

_____.

3. I LIKE TO DRAW WITH_____.

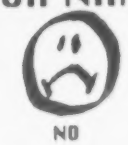
4. IS DRAWING EASY OR HARD FOR YOU?

EASY

HARD

5. CAN YOU WRITE YOUR NAME?

YES


NO

_____

MY NAME

6. CAN YOU WRITE LETTERS?

YES

NO

7. CAN YOU WRITE NUMBERS?

YES

NO

8. DO YOU LIKE MAKING CLASS BIG BOOKS?

YES

NO

Appendix G

Writing Development Checklist
(1st Gr.)

Name:

Date

C= Consistently Observed
S= Sometimes Observed
R= Rarely Observed

WRITING MECHANICS									
Prints letters horizontally (l → r)									
Writes complete sentences									
Leaves spaces between words									
Uses age appropriate handwriting									
Uses invented spelling									
High frequency words spelled correctly									
Uses capital letter for names									
Uses capital letter for "I"									
Uses capital letter at the beginning of a sentence									
Uses correct punctuation									
Uses quotation marks									

Name:

Writing Development Checklist
(1st Gr.)

Date

C= Consistently Observed
S= Sometimes Observed
R= Rarely Observed

WRITING PROCESS									
Writes 1-5 sentence stories									
Writes 6-10 sentence stories									
Writes 11-20 sentence stories									
Stories have beginning/middle/end									
Stories develop sequentially									
Engages promptly in writing									
Sustains attention to writing									
Self-selects writing topics									
Actively participates in conferencing									
Willingness to revise									
Shares writing with whole group									

Appendix H

Writing Development Checklist

Grade 3

Name:

Date

C= Consistently Observed
S= Sometimes Observed
R= Rarely Observed

PROCESS:									
Focused Topic									
A Beginning, Middle, and Ending									
Uses descriptions and details									
Title relates to the topic									
Logical sequence									
Story elements: setting, character									
Sustains attention to task									
Self selects topic									
Shares and discusses writing									
MECHANICS:									
Paragraph sense									
Appropriate punctuation used									
Capitalizes when necessary									
Writes in complete sentences									
Leaves spaces between words									
High frequency words spelled right									
Invented spelling makes sense									

Appendix I

STUDENT CHECKLIST
EARLY CHILDHOOD

NAME_____

DATE_____

1. DRAWS PICTURES

RARELY SOMETIMES FREQUENTLY

2. SCRIBBLES AND PRINTS "MOCK" LETTERS

RARELY SOMETIMES FREQUENTLY

3. COPIES PRINTED WORDS

RARELY SOMETIMES FREQUENTLY

4. COPIES DICTATED WORDS

RARELY SOMETIMES FREQUENTLY

5. USES INVENTED SPELLING

RARELY SOMETIMES FREQUENTLY

6. WRITES CONVENTIONAL WORDS

RARELY SOMETIMES FREQUENTLY

Appendix I Continued

Drawing

Independence in drawing

_____ Little.
_____ Moderate.
_____ A great deal.

Concentration/interest in drawing

_____ Little.
_____ Moderate.
_____ A great deal.

Name Writing
(done as part of "Drawing")

Concentration/interest in writing name

_____ Little.
_____ Moderate.
_____ A great deal.

Knowledge of writing first name (disregard letter directionality and formation)

_____ No knowledge of how to write first name.
_____ Minimum understanding that the name is composed of letters/symbols.
_____ Able to write one or two letters in name.
_____ Able to write several letters in name.
_____ Able to write most or all the letters in name.

Knowledge of writing last name (disregard letter directionality and formation)

_____ No knowledge of how to write last name.
_____ Minimum understanding that the name is composed of letters/symbols.
_____ Able to write one or two letters in name.
_____ Able to write several letters in name.
_____ Able to write most or all the letters in name.

Other observations, comments, and notes:

_____

_____

Rhodes, L.K. (1993). Literacy assessment: A handbook of instruments. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, Inc.

Dictation

Length and fluency of dictation

Labels objects in picture only.
_____ Less than 3 thoughts or sentences.
_____ 3-6 thoughts or sentences with a lot of prompting.
_____ 3-6 thoughts or sentences with a little prompting.
_____ 3-6 thoughts or sentences with no prompting.

Pacing of dictation

_____ Too slow/labored.
_____ Too fast for you to write.
_____ Pacing is variable; child sometimes attends to the pace of your writing and other times does not.
_____ Waits for you to finish each word before dictating another word.
_____ Waits for you to finish writing phrase/sentence/thought before dictating another.

Interest in dictation

_____ No attention paid to the writing you do during dictation.
_____ Scant attention paid to the writing you do during dictation.
_____ General attention given to the writing you do during dictation (child looks at the paper but doesn't appear to focus on print).
_____ Child's attention is focused on the words that you are writing and saying.
_____ Child attempts to reread as you are writing.

Other observations, comments, and notes:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Rhodes, L.K. (1993). Literacy assessment: A handbook of instruments. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, Inc.

Appendix J

First Grade Writing Development Checklist Data:

Writing Mechanics

September, 1995

	Consistently	Sometimes	Rarely
Prints letters horizontally	96%	4%	0%
Writes complete sentences	71%	21%	8%
Leaves spaces between words	4%	71%	25%
Uses age appropriate handwriting	8%	92%	0%
Uses invented spelling	16%	63%	21%
High frequency words spelled correctly	0%	46%	54%
Uses capital letter for name	0%	42%	58%
Uses capital letter for "I"	0%	16%	84%
Uses capital letter at start of a sentence	0%	16%	84%
Uses correct punctuation	0%	16%	84%
Uses quotation marks	0%	0%	100%

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First Grade Writing Development Checklist Data:

Writing Process

September, 1995

	Consistently	Sometimes	Rarely
Writes 1-5 sentence stories	92%	4%	4%
Writes 6-10 sentence stories	0%	0%	100%
Writes 11-20 sentence stories	0%	0%	100%
Stories have beginning/middle/end	0%	0%	100%
Stories develop sequentially	0%	4%	96%
Engages promptly in writing	54%	42%	4%
Sustains attention to writing	38%	54%	8%
Self-selects writing topics	12%	84%	4%
Participates in conferencing	0%	0%	100%
Willingness to revise	0%	0%	100%
Shares writing with whole group	21%	13%	66%

Appendix K

Third Grade Writing Development Checklist Data

September, 1995

	Consistently	Sometimes	Rarely
PROCESS			
Focused topic	17%	83%	0%
Story has beginning/middle/ending	39%	57%	4%
Uses descriptions and details	22%	39%	39%
Title relates to the topic	83%	17%	0%
Story follows a logical sequence	43%	53%	4%
Story elements present: setting, character, etc.	26%	48%	26%
Sustains attention to task	22%	61%	17%
Self-selects writing topic	26%	35%	39%
Shares and discusses writing	26%	48%	26%
MECHANICS			
Paragraph sense	13%	83%	4%
Appropriate punctuation usage	8%	70%	22%
Capitalizes when necessary	52%	35%	13%
Writes in complete sentences	48%	52%	0%
Leaves spaces between words	100%	0%	0%
High frequency words spelled correctly	30%	57%	13%
Invented spelling makes sense	70%	22%	8%

Appendix L

Early Childhood Student Checklist Data:

Writing Process

September, 1995

	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently
Draws pictures	11%	78%	11%
Scribbles and prints mock letters	44%	56%	0%
Copies printed words	100%	0%	0%
Copies dictated words	100%	0%	0%
Uses invented spelling	100%	0%	0%
Writes conventional words	100%	0%	0%

Drawing

September, 1995

	Little	Moderate	A great deal
Independence in drawing	44%	56%	0%
Concentration/Interest in drawing	22%	56%	22%
Concentration/Interest in writing name	22%	46%	32%

Name Writing

September, 1995

	First name	Last name
No knowledge	11%	100%
Minimum understanding	11%	0%
Writes 1-2 letters	45%	0%
Writes several letters	0%	0%
Writes most or all letters	33%	0%

Dictation

September, 1995

Length and fluency of dictation	%	Pacing of dictation	%	Interest in dictation
Labels pictures only	33%	Too slow/ labored	78%	Paid no attention
< 3 thoughts or sentences	11%	Too fast	22%	Paid scant attention
3-6 thoughts (much prompting)	33%	Pacing is variable	0%	Paid general attention
3-6 thoughts (little prompting)	23%	Waits for each word	0%	Attention is focused on words
3-6 thoughts (no prompting)	0%	Waits for each phrase/ thought	0%	Attempts to reread

Appendix M

List of Energizers

Thumbs-Up Sign

"Round" of Applause - Students clap their hands while moving them in a circle in front of them.

Cold Shiver - Wave hands in the air without making noise.

"Micro" Wave - Students wave using index finger only.

Wink

Crab Clap - Students clap using index finger and thumb of each hand.

"A-O.K." - Students hold the "O.K." sign up high.

High-Five Sign - Two students each raise one hand and clap them together.

Seal Clap - Students clap their forearms together.

Fancy Clap - Students quietly clap hands together opera style.

Alligator Clap - Students connect hands at wrists and snap hands together.

Air Guitar - Pretend to play guitar and say "excellent."

Appendix N

First Grade Writing Development Checklist Data:

Writing Mechanics

March, 1996

	Consistently	Sometimes	Rarely
Prints letters horizontally	100%	0%	0%
Writes complete sentences	79%	21%	0%
Leaves spaces between words	75%	25%	0%
Uses age appropriate handwriting	58%	42%	0%
Uses invented spelling	67%	29%	4%
High frequency words spelled correctly	50%	33%	17%
Uses capital letter for name	38%	58%	4%
Uses capital letter for "I"	83%	17%	0%
Uses capital letter at start of a sentence	4%	96%	0%
Uses correct punctuation	17%	83%	0%
Uses quotation marks	0%	0%	100%

First Grade Writing Development Checklist Data:

Writing Process

March, 1996

	Consistently	Sometimes	Rarely
Writes 1-5 sentence stories	92%	8%	0%
Writes 6-10 sentence stories	0%	71%	29%
Writes 11-20 sentence stories	0%	0%	100%
Stories have beginning/middle/end	71%	29%	0%
Stories develop sequentially	71%	29%	0%
Engages promptly in writing	79%	21%	0%
Sustains attention to writing	67%	33%	0%
Self-selects writing topics	92%	8%	0%
Participates in conferencing	100%	0%	0%
Willingness to revise	96%	4%	0%
Shares writing with whole group	100%	0%	0%

Appendix O

Third Grade Writing Development Checklist Data

March, 1996

	Consistently	Sometimes	Rarely
PROCESS			
Focused topic	35%	65%	0%
Story has beginning/middle/ending	48%	48%	4%
Uses descriptions and details	39%	42%	19%
Title relates to the topic	88%	12%	0%
Story follows a logical sequence	53%	47%	0%
Story elements present: setting, character, etc.	36%	58%	6%
Sustains attention to task	45%	40%	15%
Self-selects writing topic	43%	30%	27%
Shares and discusses writing	35%	48%	17%
MECHANICS			
Paragraph sense	26%	74%	0%
Appropriate punctuation usage	17%	70%	13%
Capitalizes when necessary	62%	28%	10%
Writes in complete sentences	58%	42%	0%
Leaves spaces between words	100%	0%	0%
High frequency words spelled correctly	38%	56%	6%
Invented spelling makes sense	80%	12%	8%

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APPENDIX P

Early Childhood Student Checklist Data:

Writing Process

March, 1996

	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently
Draws pictures	11%	22%	67%
Scribbles and prints mock letters	12%	44%	44%
Copies printed words	45%	22%	33%
Copies dictated words	44%	56%	0%
Uses invented spelling	100%	0%	0%
Writes conventional words	100%	0%	0%

Drawing

March, 1996

	Little	Moderate	A great deal
Independence in drawing	22%	22%	56%
Concentration/Interest in drawing	0%	56%	44%
Concentration/Interest in writing name	0%	56%	44%

Name Writing

March, 1996

	First name	Last name
No knowledge	0%	22%
Minimum understanding	12%	11%
Writes 1-2 letters	0%	45%
Writes several letters	0%	22%
Writes most or all letters	88%	0%

Dictation

March, 1996

Length and fluency of dictation	%	Pacing of dictation	%	Interest in dictation
Labels pictures only	22%	Too slow/ labored	33%	Paid no attention
< 3 thoughts or sentences	11%	Too fast	11%	Paid scant attention
3-6 thoughts (much prompting)	0%	Pacing is variable	56%	Paid general attention
3-6 thoughts (little prompting)	45%	Waits for each word	0%	Attention is focused on words
3-6 thoughts (no prompting)	22%	Waits for each phrase/ thought	0%	Attempts to reread

First Grade Student Portfolio
Writing Evaluation

Name Jennifer **Date** 1-11-96

1) How do you feel about writing?

2) What do you like best about this piece of writing?

Master Piece

3) Next time I write I will try to:

do better spelling

4) After sharing this writing I felt:

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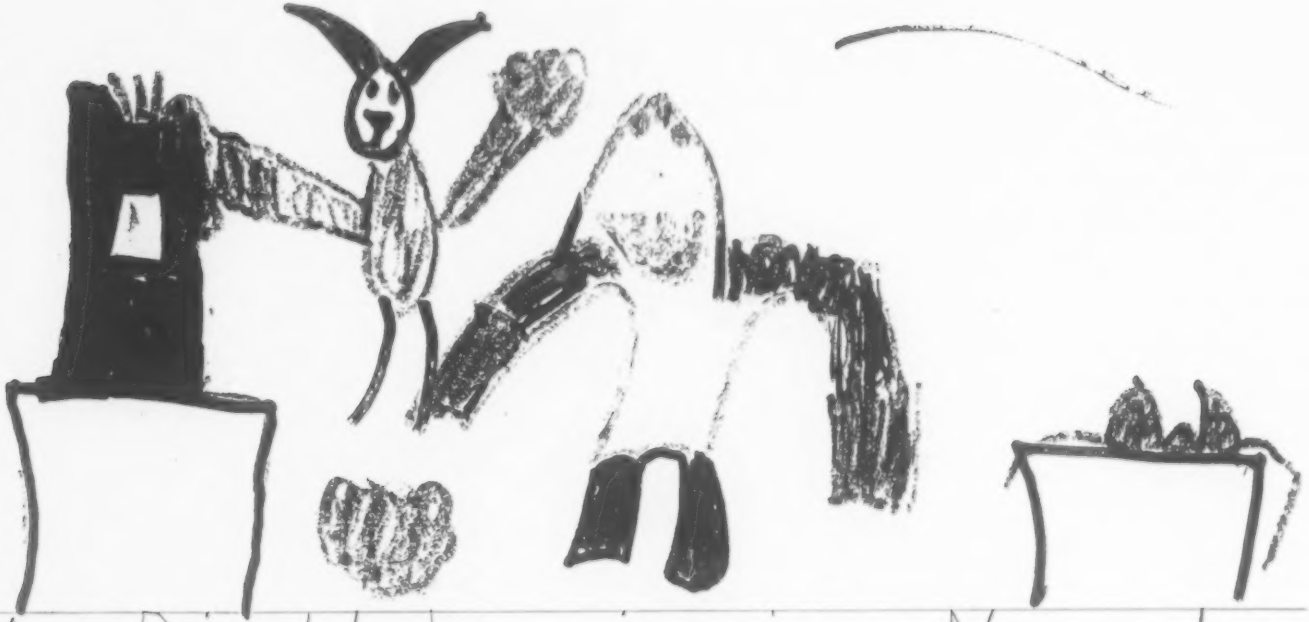

My Birthday is in Novmber.
I get lots of presents. on.
Sometimes I get Cloth
Sometimes I get toys.

First Grade Student Portfolio
Writing Evaluation

Name Tom **Date** 4-9-96

1) How do you feel about writing?

2) What do you like best about this piece of writing?

masterpiece picture

3) Next time I write I will try to:

more detail

4) After sharing this writing I felt:

Tom

Over the weekend I rented a video game. I got Yoshis island. I got so excited I tossed my cheetos and went crazy. It was great!

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STUDENT PORTFOLIO EVALUATION

NAME Michael

DATE 11-15-95

1. DO YOU LIKE THIS STORY?

2. MY FAVORITE PART IS:

Me.

3. THIS IS ONE OF MY BEST STORIES?

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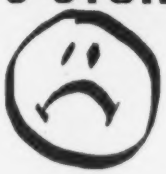
STUDENT PORTFOLIO EVALUATION

NAME Anna

DATE 3-6-96

1. DO YOU LIKE THIS STORY?

YES



NO

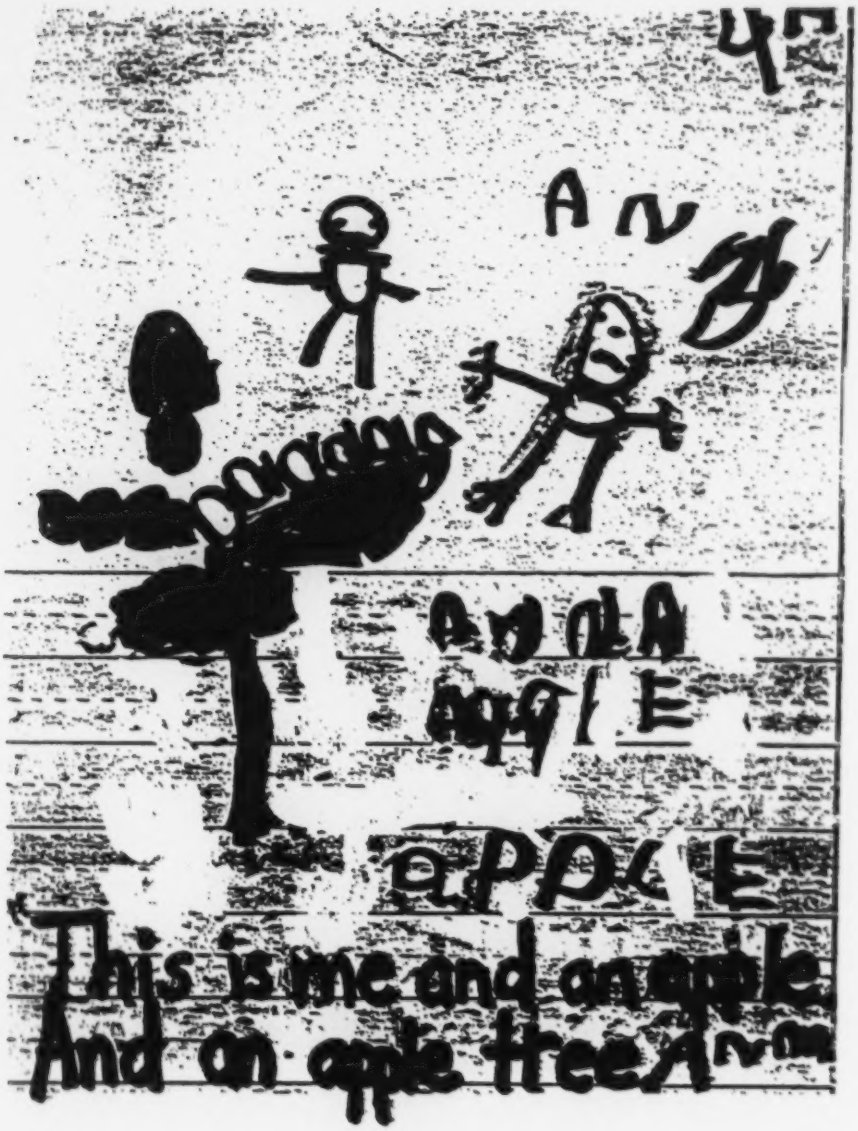
2. MY FAVORITE PART IS:

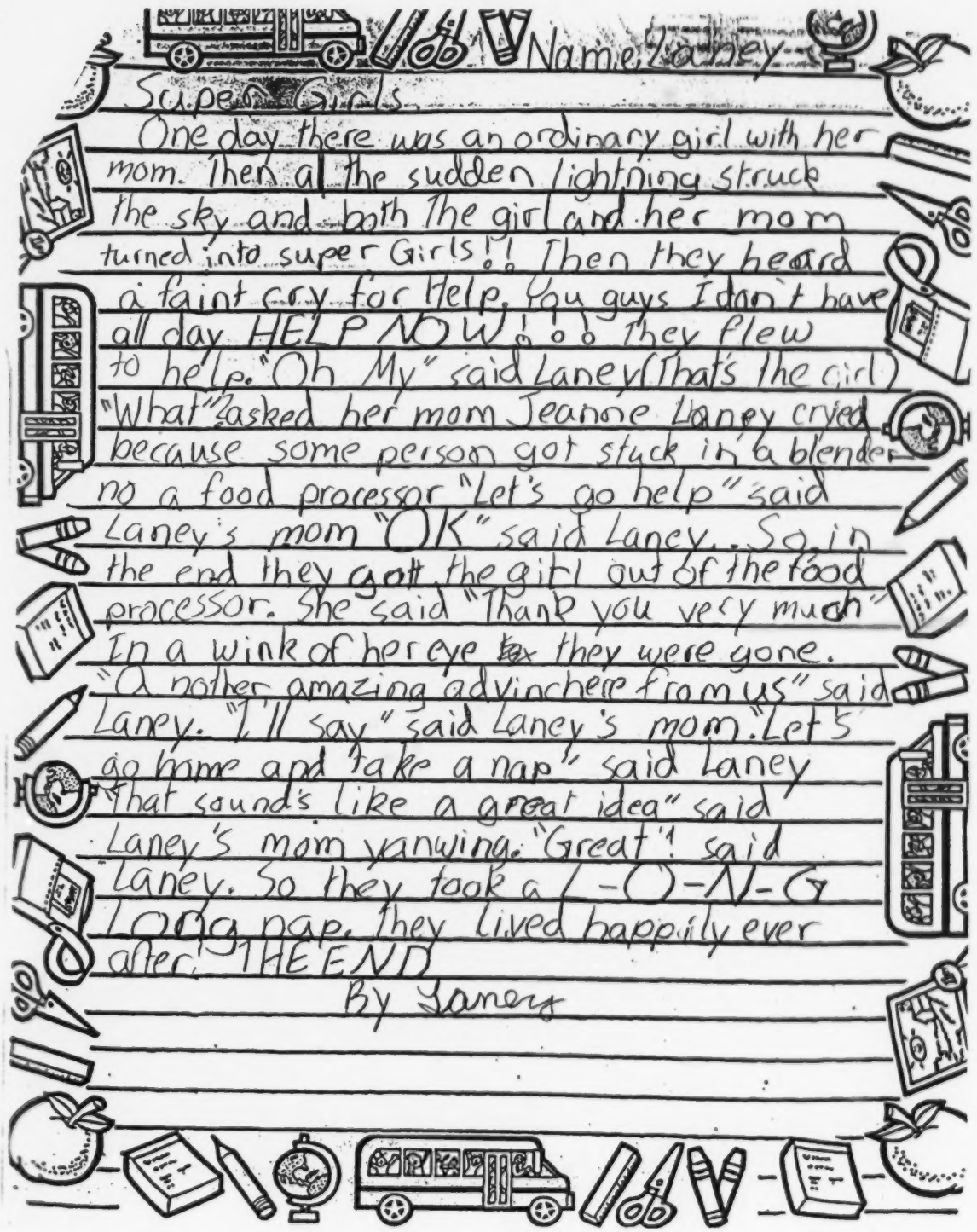
the apple tree.

3. THIS IS ONE OF MY BEST STORIES?

YES

NO


This is me and an apple
And an apple tree



Name: Laney

Super Girls

One day there was an ordinary girl with her mom. Then all the sudden lightning struck the sky and both the girl and her mom turned into super Girls!! Then they heard a faint cry for Help. You guys I don't have all day HELP NOW!!! They flew to help. "Oh My" said Laney (That's the girl) "What" asked her mom Jeanne Laney cried because some person got stuck in a blender no a food processor "Let's go help" said Laney's mom "OK" said Laney. So in the end they got the girl out of the food processor. She said "Thank you very much" In a wink of her eye ~~her~~ they were gone. "Another amazing advinchere from us" said Laney. "I'll say" said Laney's mom. "Let's go home and take a nap" said Laney "That sounds like a great idea" said Laney's mom yanwing. "Great!" said Laney. So they took a L-O-N-G Long nap. They lived happily ever after. THE END

By Laney

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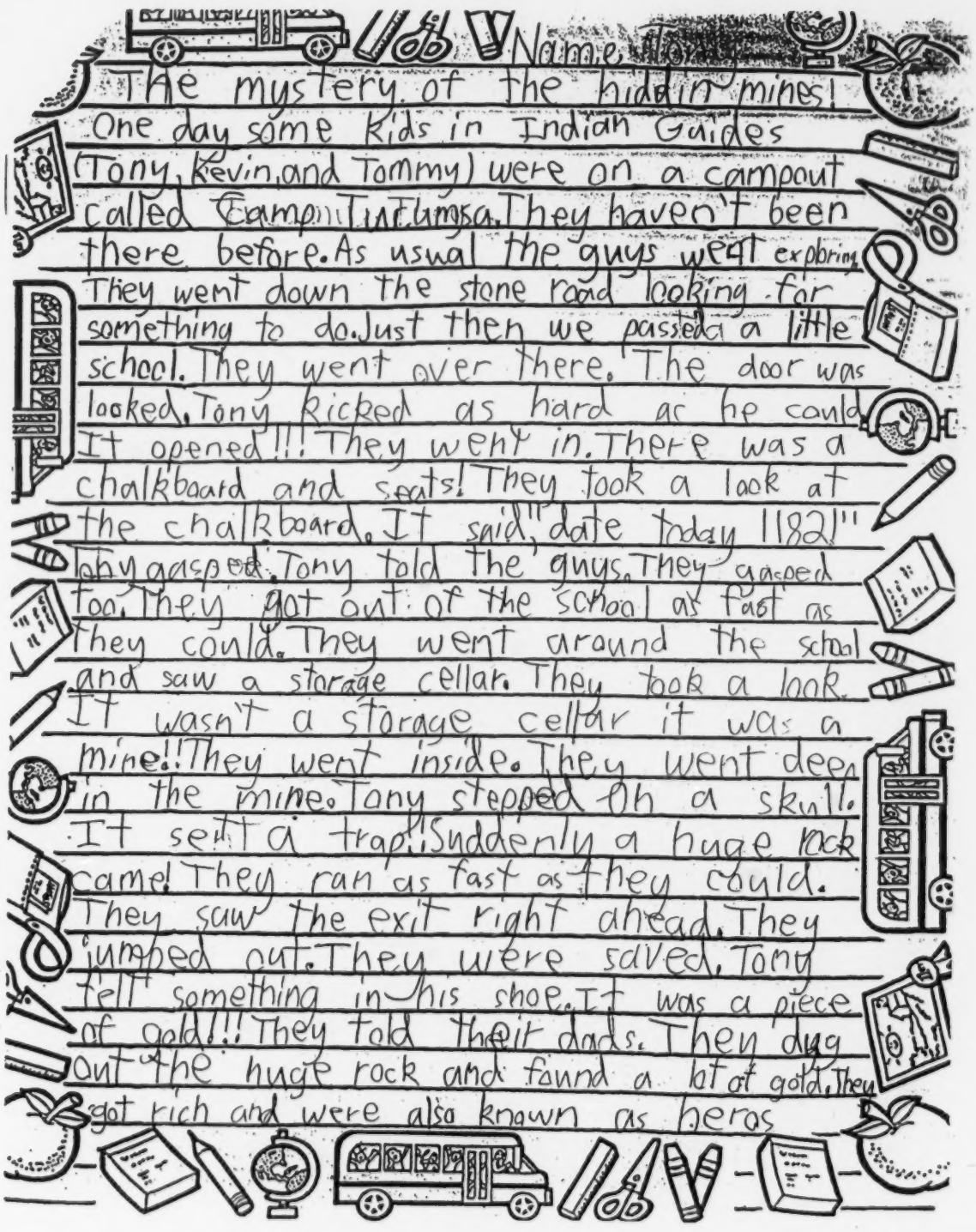

Name [illegible]

The mystery of the hiddin mines!

One day some kids in Indian Guides (Tony, Kevin, and Tommy) were on a campout called Camp Tuk Tumsa. They haven't been there before. As usual the guys went exploring. They went down the stone road looking for something to do. Just then we passed a little school. They went over there. The door was looked. Tony kicked as hard as he could. It opened!!! They went in. There was a chalkboard and seats! They took a look at the chalkboard. It said, "date today 11821" They gasped. Tony told the guys. They gasped too. They got out of the school as fast as they could. They went around the school and saw a storage cellar. They took a look. It wasn't a storage cellar it was a mine!! They went inside. They went deep in the mine. Tony stepped on a skull. It set a trap!! Suddenly a huge rock came! They ran as fast as they could. They saw the exit right ahead. They jumped out. They were saved. Tony felt something in his shoe. It was a piece of gold!!! They told their dads. They dug out the huge rock and found a lot of gold. They got rich and were also known as heros

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